

Lake Michigan Fisheries Team
May 24, 2001 - Deland Center, Sheboygan

Revised Notes (prepared by Bill Horns)

These notes summarize LMFT decisions and recommendations, and are not intended as a summary of all discussions.

Present: Bill Horns, George Boronow, Tom Hansen, Mike Toneys, Justine Hasz, Brad Eggold, John Kubisiak, Pradeep Hirethota, Matt Coffaro, Steve Hogler, Lee Meyers.

Next meeting: 9 a.m., Monday, July 30 to 3 p.m. Tuesday July 31. Sturgeon Bay Service Center.

Green Bay yellow perch

The LMFT discussed the May 21 hearings and options for future action. A full written review of oral and written hearing comments has not yet been prepared, and additional written comments may still be received. However, those of us who participated in or attended the hearings were able to share the gist of what was heard.

We discussed options under three headings: 1) Possible emergency order for NRB adoption in June, to take effect July 1. 2) Action on the present rule, FH-12-01. 3) Future rule making.

Emergency rule-making. The following options were discussed: 1) 10-fish daily bag limit with a 20,000 pound commercial harvest limit (i.e., identical to FH-12-01). 2) 10-fish daily bag limit with a 38,000 pound commercial harvest limit (i.e., a commercial harvest limit chosen to approximate the sport harvest in 2000). 3) 10-fish daily bag limit with a commercial closure, but the option of allowing commercial harvest under contract). 4) 10-fish daily bag limit with commercial closure and no contract fishery. 5) 5-fish daily bag limit with a commercial closure. 6) Total closure of both sport and commercial fisheries. 7) 25-fish daily bag limit with a 38,000 pound commercial harvest limit. 8) No emergency rule. Action on FH-12-01. The same options were listed, with the additional option of having the commercial harvest limit automatically adjusted annually to approximate the weight of the previous year's sport harvest. Future rule making. We also discussed possible additional rule-making, but without resolution.

No consensus was reached, although a clear majority favored setting a 5-fish daily sport bag limit and closing the commercial fishery. The LMFT charge states that when decisions cannot be reached by consensus, they will be referred to the Policy Committee (Horns, Eggold, Meyers). In this case, two of the three members of the Policy Committee favored advancing FH-12-01 as drafted, and bringing an identical emergency order to the NRB for adoption in June (to take effect July 1).

White fish trap net issues.

The team discussed these three issues together. Our study of trap netting outside 90 feet is into its second year. Participating commercial fishers believe that it is clearly showing that the maximum depth should be increased, and are asking us to initiate the rule-making process immediately, so that a new rule is in effect by next March 1. The Lake Michigan Fisheries Forum has recommended unanimously (with one absent member) that we allow whitefish trap nets in Whitefish Bay, as also recommended by the LMCFB.

We reached the following five-part recommendation. 1) Provisionally support increasing the maximum trap net depth, subject to an early review of the data and a discussion by the Lake Michigan Fisheries Forum of possible user-conflicts related to deeper trap nets sets. 2) Support opening Whitefish Bay to trap nets, realizing that some user-conflicts concerns may be raised in hearings. 3) Ask the LMFF to continue trying to find a resolution of the Zone 3 trap net season issue. 4) Seek to develop a single whitefish trap net rule package ASAP (to be in effect no later than 7/1/02), but only following further LMFF discussion of deep trap nets and resolution of the Zone 3 issue. 5) Ask the LMFF to address all these issues in a summer meeting to which the interested public would be invited.

Closed yellow perch sport fishing season on Lake Michigan.

Public concerns have been raised about allowing the pre-spawning harvest of adult female yellow perch from Lake Michigan. The SER unit will look at preliminary creel data from Spring, 2001. If the harvest appears significant, SER unit will develop a rule-proposal recommendation for consideration by the LMFT in July. Options then will include sending the proposal through the Conservation Congress spring hearing process for adoption in 2002 to take effect in 2003, or seeking a faster route to adoption.

Team Nearshore

Steve Hogler (with assistance from John Kubisiak and Sue Marquenski) will prepare a response to the CLC regarding Michigan concerns with Firehole strain steelhead. We plan to request eggs of Firehole steelhead this fall. If CLC approval is not obtained, the request will be withdrawn, or the fish used for inland stockings.

Concern with declining weir returns of steelhead have prompted discussions of methods to reduce harvest. Preliminary analysis of data from Little Manistee River (Michigan) indicates constant or declining returns in recent years with increasing stocking, parallel to what has occurred in Wisconsin.

Charter data from 1999 and 2000 indicate that steelhead harvest would have been reduced by 5.7 to 8.5% with a 2-fish bag limit; 20.0 to 28.6% with a 1-fish bag. John Kubisiak and Brad Eggold will model the effects of reduced bag limits on steelhead harvest in the angler creel.

Early catch-and-release smallmouth bass season on Green Bay.

Tom Hansen briefly reviewed the proposal to establish such a season, and described the range of opinions among wardens. Because of concerns about stress and hooking mortality on spawning bass, the LMFT recommended opposing the proposal.